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Laos and the Southeast Asia Crisis

Speech of
Hon. Thomas J. Dodd
of Connecticut
in the
Senate of the United States
Monday, May 21, 1962

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HON. THOMAS J. DODD

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Mr. DODD. Mr. President, we are all, I know, deeply distressed over the trend of events in Laos. No one could help but be impressed by the President's message, and by his warning concerning the gravity of the situation in southeast Asia.

President Kennedy will, I am certain, have the support of all of us in his decision to dispatch American troops to defensive positions on the Laotian frontier, and for any further measures he may find it necessary to take to prevent the subjugation of southeast Asia by international communism.

In his prompt and solitary decision to send American forces into Thailand, President Kennedy has provided the kind of leadership which galvanized the free world at the time of the Korean invasion, the kind of leadership which our Allies expect of us. By his actions President Kennedy has greatly bolstered the entire position of the free world in the southeast Asia crisis. But these energetic measures, I fear, will be seriously undermined and conceivably negated unless we also take measures to reappraise and revise certain aspects of our policy in Laos.

Both Republican and Democratic administrations have committed themselves to defend the freedom of Laos against the threat of Communist aggression. When SEATO was established after the fall of North Vietnam, Laos was specifically brought under the SEATO umbrella and the Asian Communists were warned that an attack against it would result in a collective response by the SEATO powers.

But today, despite our one-time assurances to Laos and despite the assurances we have now given to Vietnam and to Thailand, the fact remains that Laos stands in serious danger of a Communist take-over.

The present crisis makes it imperative that we reappraise our recent policy in Laos, to see where we have erred and what might be done, even at this late date, to salvage something from the situation.

In Laos, Communist tactics have admittedly been complex, but they have in no way been novel. On the one hand, they have exercised military pressure through native guerrillas and North Vietnamese troops. On the other hand, they have inactivated us through protracted negotiations and bewitched us with the prospect of a neutralist Laos, governed by a Communist-neutralist-conservative coalition.

In Laos, indeed, our entire policy has been predicated on the assumption that Soviet desires did not go beyond the establishment of a truly neutral government, open to the influence of Moscow and Washington alike. It is in line with this belief that we have urged our Laotian friends to enter into a coalition government with the Communist and neutralist forces. But the prospects of peaceful coexistence in Laos have been shattered by the events of the past week.

That the United States has been played for a fool—

Said the distinguished columnist, Marguerite Higgins, in the New York Herald Tribune, Monday, May 14—

was evident in Washington, firstly, from events in Laos, where Red troops led by Hanoi and Red-Chinese trained officers were ferociously giving the lie to the Harriman doctrine * * *. It was evident from the small, smug smiles of the Communist statesmen and journalists in Washington, who were patronizingly telling the subdued and silent non-Communist set that—in the

words of one Soviet bloc official—"the New Frontier never really set much store by Laos anyway, so how could you consider it a setback?" It was evident from the cold indifference with which Moscow heard out Washington's pleas to live up to pledges to support the cease-fire.

The crisis of Laos represents a crisis of the first magnitude for the whole of southeast Asia. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that it represents a crisis of the first magnitude for the whole free world.

The countries of southeast Asia are rich in natural resources. But it is their strategic importance, rather than their economic importance, that makes them primary targets of Communist aggression.

If the Communists ever succeeded in establishing their dominion over the whole of southeast Asia, they will, in effect, have cut the world in half. The western Pacific land mass will be theirs from the Bering Straits to Singapore, while the control of the southern island chain, from Sumatra to New Guinea, would give them command of the entrances from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean.

The Communists conquest of southeast Asia would produce so serious a shift in the world balance of power that our very ability to survive would be called into question.

From our recent policy in Vietnam and from the commitment we have now made to Thailand, it would appear that we have accepted the harsh reality that our own security and the security of southeast Asia are inseparably intertwined. The most dramatic evidence of this is the fact that 5,000 American soldiers are today serving in South Vietnam as instructors in guerrilla warfare, as transport pilots, and as advisers in combat areas, while another several thousand have now been dispatched to the frontier of Thailand.

The administration has made it clear by these commitments that South Viet-

nam and Thailand will not be permitted to fall to communism. But we have been warned, and rightly, that it may take many years before this battle is won, and that it will almost certainly take a much heavier commitment in American manpower and, conceivably, in American blood.

The Communist assault on the countries of southeast Asia has been incredibly persistent, incredibly cunning, and remarkably successful.

Their primary weapon in this area has been guerrilla movements, organized and trained in and supported from territory already under their control. With this weapon they almost succeeded in taking over Malaya, they succeeded in conquering the larger part of Vietnam, and they have now taken control of the larger part of Laos.

In Malaya, the number of Communist guerrillas never exceeded 10,000. But it required the expenditure of billions of dollars and the efforts of a highly trained British Commonwealth force of several hundred thousand men over a period of 5 years before the Malayan guerrillas were brought under control. As a result of the British experience in Malaya, it is now accepted as a fact that, even employing troops of the highest quality, a successful antiguerrilla operation requires antiguerrilla forces 10 to 15 times as numerous as the guerrilla forces which oppose them.

In Vietnam, when I was there less than a year ago, the number of Communist guerrillas was estimated at approximately 10,000 men. Opposing them was a Vietnamese army some 120,000 strong, backed up by another 30 or 40 thousand home guards. But even with these numerical odds, the Government was able to make no serious headway against the guerrillas. More than 1,000 Government representatives and village administrators were being assassinated every month. Every day brought new reports of attacks on

bridges and powerhouses and other installations. The hard-pressed Government army, which had done without leave for many months, was strained to the breaking point. The administration of the country was slowly deteriorating as a result of the terrible casualties inflicted on administrators and technicians at all levels of government. The morale of the people was sagging.

I wholeheartedly applaud the administration's commitment to save South Vietnam from the growing menace of Communist subversion. But, on the basis of what I saw and learned in the course of an extensive tour of southeast Asia last year, I am afraid that there has been a tendency to focus too narrowly on South Vietnam.

As matters stand today, I believe that our policy in South Vietnam is in conflict with our policy in Laos, that our policy in Laos, as a matter of fact, is undermining the affirmative and courageous policy we are endeavoring to follow in Vietnam.

I think we would all have less difficulty in understanding the world situation if we studied our maps more frequently. In the case of Laos, its strategic importance should be instantly apparent from a look at the map.

If there is any one country that may be described as the geographic heart of southeast Asia, it is Laos. For Laos has common frontiers with virtually every country in the area—with Communist China and North Vietnam, with the neutralist nations of Cambodia and Burma, and with the two committed nations of the southeast Asia mainland, South Vietnam and Thailand.

Toward the end of 1960, Soviet planes began airlifting supplies to the Lao Communist, or Pathet Lao, forces. At this point, the Soviets were still very uncertain of our reaction. The first Soviet planes that flew in carried benzene. These Soviet planes discharged

their cargoes unmolested: we did nothing. Perhaps President Eisenhower did not want to commit the American Government to a potentially hazardous course of action in the last days of his regime.

In any event, the next group of Soviet planes that arrived carried small arms ammunition. Still, we did nothing.

Then Soviet planes began to arrive bearing jeeps and howitzers and other heavy equipment. Still, we did nothing.

Finally, when it was apparent that they could intervene with impunity, and that there would be no American reaction, the Communists began flying in technicians and military personnel.

There still was the possibility that SEATO would honor its obligations to defend Laos against the threat of Communist aggression. But when the SEATO Council met in April of 1961, it took no action. The SEATO nations in the immediate area—the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan—all favored common military action in defense of Laos. Britain and France objected. The United States sat on the fence. And since all SEATO decisions must be unanimous, SEATO did nothing.

I want to emphasize that at the time this SEATO meeting took place, our Asian allies were prepared to provide all or most of the necessary ground troops. They took the stand that it was much better for Asians to fight in Asia and that, if SEATO did intervene, American participation should consist primarily of air and logistical support. Had we provided the necessary leadership at this historic session of SEATO, Laos would not be on the verge of falling to communism today. But instead of providing such leadership, our own primacy in SEATO was used as a brake to prevent the Asian member nations from taking the measures of collective self-defense which they considered essential.

Our Asian allies were bitterly disappointed.

We are prepared to fight and die with you if necessary—

Philippine Foreign Minister Serano said to me just a year ago this month—but we cannot fight without American leadership.

For this delinquency we shall, I am afraid, have to pay a heavy price both in American and Asian blood.

One of the excuses that has been offered for our own inaction in Laos is that the Lao people and the Lao Army have shown no will or ability to resist the Communists. This is coupled with the assertion that the Communists apparently have far more popular backing than does the Royal Lao Government.

Even if these assertions were completely true—which they are not—it would, in my opinion, still be necessary to defend Laos; even if we were not interested in the fate of the Lao people, the defense of Laos would still be a strategic necessity because, ultimately, the fate of all southeast Asia and our own security may hinge on it.

But I do not accept the thesis that the Lao people are indifferent to communism and that the Royalist forces are incapable of fighting.

I remind the Senators that it was a year ago last December that the Royalist army, under General Phoumi, drove the highly touted Kong Le rebels out of Vientiane.

I remind the Senators, too, that certain units of the Lao Army, in particular the 10,000 Meo tribesmen who are serving with it, have put up truly heroic resistance in situation after situation.

I call to their attention the fact that there are now more than 40,000 refugees from Communist terror in the Vientiane area, and that hundreds more are arriving every day.

I call to their attention the reports of the dedicated American missionary,

Father Matthew Menger, whom I met in Laos, and whom I recently had the pleasure of seeing again in this country. Father Menger is one of the very few Americans who speak Laotian fluently. He has traveled extensively on foot throughout the country. He has, even in recent months, visited many villages in territory that is supposed to be under firm Communist control. Father Menger has reported that the Communists control the strategic centers; but even in the northern province of Samneua, which was the first to fall to the Communists, the capital city of Samneua is completely surrounded by anti-Communist villages.

As of 2 years ago, it was probably true that few Laotians knew the meaning of communism or felt very strongly about it. But, as of today, the evidence is that the Laotian people have learned the meaning of communism the hard way, from their actual experiences under Communist rule in those portions of the country that have been overrun by the Laotian and Vietnamese Red forces.

True, the Laotians, by and large, are not a martial people. There may be a number of reasons for this. Certainly one of them is the orthodox Buddhist religion which prevails in Laos and which frowns upon the killing of any living thing, even so useless a thing as a mosquito. But American military men with whom I discussed the situation told me that, with adequate training and proper leadership, the Lao can be a very good fighting man. They said that certain of the best trained units in the Royalist army had conducted themselves in a highly creditable manner in engagements with the Communists. Against the Laotian Communists, I was told, the Royal army was generally able to hold its own and better. But they were simply no match for the hardened professionals of the North Vietnamese Communist army which has been participating in

the Laotian civil war through independent units and through units of specialists attached to the Laotian Communist forces.

There is another reason, in my opinion, why the Royal Laotian army units have frequently failed to stand up against the Communist enemy. All the world has confidence in a winner; and in Asia, far more than in Western countries, human behavior is determined by a belief in an irresistible wave of the future or by an equally fatalistic acceptance of certain downfall and defeat.

With their aggression, their determination, their persistence, their arrogant self-confidence, and the unstinting backing they have received from the Soviet Union and Red China, the Lao Communists have succeeded in creating the impression that they are part of the irresistible wave of the future. By our own inaction and by our repeated failures to live up to our assurances, we have fostered the corollary impression that our side is doomed.

Under these circumstances, who can blame the Lao army if its morale has frequently been uncertain? Even Americans serving as instructors and advisers in Laos have been demoralized by the ambivalence of American policy. For example, last Sunday over one radio news program, an American instructor in Laos was quoted as saying:

Why am I here trying to teach these people to fight, if it's already been decided that the country is to be turned over to the Communists?

Parenthetically, at this point, I would like to say a few words about the unfortunate habit of designating Prince Boun Oum and Gen. Phoumi Nouvasan as rightwing leaders. The manner in which this description has been used by the press and, regrettably, by some State Department spokesmen, somehow suggests that Prince Boun Oum and General Phoumi are exploiters or big landowners or political reactionaries. Actually, Laos

is a very primitive country without any landowning or capitalist class, and from a purely economic standpoint, it makes little sense to talk of rightwing or leftwing. I believe it would be far more correct and far more meaningful, and certainly, it would feed far less grist to the Communist propaganda mill, if our press could learn to refer to the Communists as "Communists" and to people like Prince Boun Oum and General Phoumi as Loyalist or anti-Communist leaders rather than rightwing leaders.

I consider this matter of nomenclature of the greatest importance, because it is with insidious little words like these that public opinion is poisoned against our friends in other countries.

Against the background of SEATO's failure, the Lao Government in May of last year agreed to negotiations with the Communists.

Speaking in Manila a year ago, and speaking on the floor of the Senate on my return from the Far East, I said that the Communists would not be satisfied with the partial conquest of Laos, and that they would violate the cease-fire at every opportunity. For the accuracy of this prediction, I take no particular credit. I believe that this prediction could have been made by anyone familiar with Communist tactics.

Since the cease-fire was signed, the Communists have occupied point after point, until today they hold more than half of Laos. North Vietnamese intervention, previously limited and carefully veiled, is now unconcealed and massive. At the present time, there are reported to be in excess of 7,000 battle-hardened soldiers of the North Vietnamese armies fighting alongside the Lao Communist forces.

Communist supplies are moving into Laos at a constantly accelerated rate, by land and by air, supporting the greatly increased Communist military activities, both in Laos and in Vietnam. As a matter of fact, it is thanks primarily to their

control of this area adjoining South Vietnam that the Vietnamese Communists have been able to double the size of their guerrilla forces in South Vietnam over the past year.

And while all this has been going on, we have continued to negotiate with undeterred good faith, in the hope that a truly neutral government can be constructed around the personality of Souvanna Phouma.

Prince Souvanna Phouma, we are told, is not a Communist. But I also recall that we were told that Castro was not a Communist. For my own part, I believe that we are building our foreign policy on forlorn and impossible hopes when we assume that Prince Souvanna Phouma, who has visited the Communist capitals but has refused an invitation to the United States, and who openly shares offices and living quarters with his half-brother Prince Souphanouvong, the acknowledged head of the Lao Communist movement, will save Laos from communism.

When I was in Laos last May, I was assured categorically that we would never consent to giving the Communists the key positions of the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defense in any coalition government. But today, it is reported that our representatives have agreed to assign both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior to the designees of the so-called neutralist leader, Prince Souvanna Phouma, on the specious theory that a Souvanna Phouma government is the only thing that can save Laos from a complete take-over by the Communists. Not merely have we accepted this position, but for several months now we have been pressuring our Lao friends to enter into such a coalition government against their own better judgment.

Prime Minister Prince Boun Oum and his Defense Minister, General Phoumi, have, to their credit, resisted our pressures. And, to our shame, we have now

cut off our monthly assistance to the government of Laos in an effort to force them into a coalition with the Communists.

THE QUESTION OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS

I do not know whether to be surprised or awed over the fact that, after so many sorry experiences, we have again fallen for that most shopworn of all the Communists shell games: the coalition government.

The free world first fell for the coalition government trick during World War II. In November 1944, having abandoned General Mihailovitch in Yugoslavia, Britain and the United States attempted the impossible task of preventing a Communist take-over by forcing Prime Minister Subasic into a coalition government with Marshal Tito. Needless to say, there were all kinds of assurances from Marshal Tito that he did not intend to communize Yugoslavia, and that there would be free elections at an early date.

In February 1945 at the Yalta Conference, the Tito-Subasic formula was to become the model for a whole series of coalition governments in central Europe—coalition governments which invariably and, in my opinion, inevitably paved the way for a complete Communist take-over. The central formula of the Yalta Declaration promised the liberated countries of Europe, "governmental authorities broadly representative of all democratic elements of the population." This, of course, was a euphemism for coalition governments.

Hardly had the Tito-Subasic agreement been signed, than Tito began to dishonor its terms. He made it clear that by free elections he meant elections with a single slate of Communist-approved candidates. The few non-Communist political leaders in the cabinet were removed, and placed in prison or total obscurity.

With minor differences in timing and technique, the coalition governments established in Rumania, Bulgaria, Hun-

gary, Poland and Czechoslovakia developed along similar patterns.

The proven Communist techniques for subverting representative government via interparty coalitions has been described with amazing frankness by the Czechoslovak Communist, Jan Kozak, in a book intended as a guide for fellow-Communists. In this booklet, Mr. Kozak spoke of "the possibility of forming a government of broad democratic forces grouped around the working class, relying on the revolutionary activity of the masses. Such a government can be set up without armed battle by peaceful means. Its installation would be practically tantamount to the establishment of the democratic revolutionary power of the people." Specific lessons were drawn from the Red take-over in Czechoslovakia.

Mr. Kozak's formula calls for a combination of "pressure from above" and "pressure from below" to convert the coalition government into a "socialist" one. He said:

Gradually, as the national and democratic revolution changed into a socialist one, the pressure "from above" was applied in an ever-increasing measure for the direct suppression and destruction of the counter-revolutionary machinations of the bourgeoisie. Let us recall the signal role played in the development and extension of that pressure by the Ministry of the Interior, for instance, which was led by the Communists, and the units of State Security directed by them.

I challenge anyone to read Mr. Kozak's brochure outlining the Communist theory and practice of coalition governments, and come away from this reading still convinced that Communists can enter into coalitions in good faith.

I find it all the more difficult to understand our present policy in Laos because Ambassador Harriman has, himself, had a very personal and exceedingly bitter experience with coalition governments in the immediate postwar period.

The governments set up in the central European countries after their "liberation" by the Red Army did not corre-

spond in any way to the democratic governments that had been forecast by the Yalta Declaration.

Speaking in the House of Commons on August 20, 1945, the British Foreign Secretary said:

The governments which have been set up in Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary do not, in the view of the British Government, represent a majority of the people. The impression I got from recent developments was that one kind of totalitarianism was being replaced by another. * * * The form of government being set up does not impress me as being sufficiently representative to meet the requirements of diplomatic relations.

It was against this background that the foreign ministers of the allied powers met in Moscow in December 1945. Despite the wholesale violation of the Yalta agreement, the British and American Governments joined the Soviet Government in calling for the establishment of a new coalition in Rumania. This coalition was to include representatives of the two national parties, the National Peasant and the National Liberal Party, and it was to be followed by free and unfettered elections. To carry out this agreement, a supervisory commission consisting of Foreign Minister Vishinsky, Ambassador Harriman, and British Ambassador Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, was sent to Bucharest.

Jules Maniu, the revered leader of the Peasant Party, and the other democratic leaders warned the Western Ambassadors that the Communists had absolutely no scruples and that their assurance of free elections meant nothing. But Sir Clark-Kerr and Mr. Harriman argued against these misgivings and urged the democratic Rumanian leaders to enter into the coalition.

What happened subsequently is a matter of recent history; but our memories, unfortunately, seem even too short for this small span. The opposition press was completely suppressed. Opposition parties were first intimidated, then terrorized, then illegalized. The opposition leaders, Jules Maniu of the

Peasant Party, Bratianu of the National Liberal Party, and Petrescu of the Social Democratic Party, were all imprisoned; and in July 1951 it was reported that Maniu died in prison, a martyr to his country's freedom.

Today in Laos, it seems to me that the tragedy of Rumania is being repeated almost step for step. Even some of the cast is the same. Thus, we find Mr. Harriman urging the Lao anti-Communist leaders, against their own better judgment, to enter into a coalition government with the Communists; and I take it for granted that Mr. Harriman must be repeating some of the well intentioned assurances that he gave to the democratic political leaders in Rumania in 1946.

The assurances in Laos, I am afraid, have not always been the most friendly. I should like to draw the attention of my colleagues to the following account by the distinguished American correspondent, Joseph Alsop, which appeared in the New York Herald Tribune for April 23, 1962:

Governor Harriman looked at the Lao leaders one by one; pointed a stern forefinger at each of them in turn; and told them that he wished them to know they would be "responsible for the destruction of their country" if they refused to do his bidding. There was a brief silence, and General Phoumi then replied: "You know, Governor Harriman, we in Laos have many years' experience of colonial rule. But we were never spoken to in quite that fashion in the colonial times."

The coalition government gambit has had results just as disastrous in Asia as in Europe. In fact, our commitment to a coalition government in China in the postwar period was perhaps more responsible than any other single factor for the loss of mainland China to the Communists.

The commitment to a coalition government or a "government of national unity" was formalized in the so-called Marshall directive of December 1945. This directive, which was drafted by John Carter Vincent, the head of the

Far Eastern Desk in the Department of State, reflected the philosophy of the Institute of Pacific Relations, which for many years had enjoyed a near monopoly on Far Eastern expertise.

At the time when the Marshall directive was issued, the Nationalist forces occupied the bulk of China, had overwhelming military superiority, and were pressing offensives against the Communists at a number of points. In a misguided effort to force President Chiang into a coalition government with the Communists, Secretary of State Marshall, in the summer of 1946, placed an embargo on arms and ammunition to the Nationalist forces. Repeatedly, the Nationalists were told that unless and until they came to terms with the Communists, they could expect no active assistance from the United States. Finally, in the fall of that year, with the aid of the embargo and a variety of other pressures, the Department of State succeeded in forcing President Chiang to agree to an armistice, and to conversations with the Communists with a view to forming a coalition government.

These conversations dragged on for months and months, punctuated by repeated violations of the cease-fire by the Communists. The Chinese Reds, for their part, maintained the pretense of favoring a coalition government until the Nationalist position had so weakened that the Communists were no longer interested in compromise.

Our folly in China persisted to the bitter end. As late as March 1948, the administration reiterated its adherence to the principles enunciated in the Marshall directive.

Commenting on the similarity between our ill-fated China policy and our present policy in Laos, the New York Times said editorially on May 12, 1962:

The American policy is based on Washington's belief that the Lao are uninterested in political or ideological conflicts and, in contrast to the Vietnamese, will not fight.

But to back up that policy and force the pro-Western leaders into the coalition with the Communists, even to surrender the army and police, which they refuse, American authorities have tended to undercut the pro-Western Government, even to accuse it of provocation, until this policy begins to resemble that which lost China.

In justification of the coalition policy in Laos, it has been argued that not every government which included Communist ministers has wound up by succumbing to communism. It has been pointed out that such coalitions did, in fact, exist in France, in Italy, and in Finland, and one or two other countries in the postwar period.

This comparison completely skirts the issue. France and Italy emerged unscathed from the postwar experiments in coalition because there was no Communist military presence in these countries, because their security forces and the armed forces remained under anti-Communist control, and because the democratic parties in these countries disposed of very considerable resources in men, money, and experience.

Finland survived her postwar coalition because the Finns are one of the toughest people in Europe and perhaps the most sophisticated about the ways of their Soviet neighbors.

But Laos is not France or Italy; and the Laotian people, in terms of sophistication, cannot be likened to the French, Italians, or the Finns. Given the massive presence of the Red Chinese and North Vietnamese army on its frontiers, given the existence in Laos of substantial units of Red Chinese and Vietnamese forces, given the lack of national unity, the lack of sophistication, the dearth of political leadership, not even a miracle could save Laos if it were ever saddled with a coalition government such as is now proposed.

I cannot understand the persistence in believing, despite all the available evidence, that Souvanna Phouma is truly a neutralist, that he is not under Communist domination, and that he can be

trusted to designate non-Communists for the positions of Minister of Defense and Minister of the Interior.

In an interview with Ronald Stead of the Christian Science Monitor, which appeared in the March 21, 1962, issue of that paper, Prince Souphanouvong, the Laotian Communist leader, on the one hand denied that his half-brother Prince Souvanna Phouma "is a prisoner of the Pathet Lao." Mr. Stead wrote:

He described this as "an odious calumny against the rightful Prime Minister of Laos (Souvanna Phouma) and a maneuver to cause a split between my half-brother's government and the Pathet Lao."

On the other hand, Prince Souphanouvong said to Mr. Stead:

Nobody can destroy the firm solidarity forged in the fire of battle. For this reason American efforts to separate us must be in vain.

Mr. Stead, incidentally, was to my knowledge the only American correspondent to point out that—

Souvanna Phouma now has headquarters and joint residence with his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the pro-Communist Pathet Lao armed forces and their political counterpart, the Neo Lao Haksat.

In the light of all this, it is inconceivable to me that the kind of coalition government now proposed can terminate in anything but a Communist Laos. True, there are a few instances of coalition governments—France, Italy, and Finland—which did not terminate in disaster. But this was only so because the democratic elements in these countries succeeded in extricating themselves from the coalitions with the Communists at their earliest opportunity.

It can be stated categorically that there has never been an instance of a stable, neutral coalition government, embracing Communists and non-Communists.

It can be stated categorically that there has never been an instance of a coalition government that has served the interests of the free world.

It can be stated categorically that there has never been a coalition government in which the Communists held the twin positions of the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defense, which did not culminate in a complete Communist take-over.

It is in the light of this historic experience, that we must take a fresh look at the situation in Laos.

To let Laos fall to communism while we attempt to defend South Vietnam would be like trying to catch the flood waters in buckets, while doing nothing to strengthen or maintain the river levees. I have discussed the situation in Southeast Asia with a number of military men with experience in the area, and I have yet to meet one who does not agree with this estimate. But apparently in this situation, as in other situations, we have paid scant attention to the opinions of our military men.

We have also paid scant attention to American missionaries serving in the field. Why we consult them so little, I shall never be able to understand, because they are a remarkably dedicated and intelligent group of men, who have no political ax to grind, who invariably speak the language of the country, who have lived with the people, and who have traveled widely, frequently on foot. They are in a far better position than most people to know what is going on in a country such as Laos or the Congo.

In this connection, I would point out that our policy in China went off the tracks when our State Department fell for the proposition that the Chinese Reds were really agrarian reformers. American missionaries in China warned against this policy, but no one listened to them. By the time we got the "agrarian reformer" sand out of our eyes, China had gone Communist.

Speaking from a more recent and more personal experience, I believe that many of the mistakes we have made in our Congo policy could have been

avoided if we had troubled to obtain the opinions of the scores of American missionaries who are today serving there, and who know the country far more intimately than most foreigners there. But so far as I know, the many dedicated American missionaries in the Congo were never asked for their opinion; and the few that offered their opinions were ignored.

During the past week, the Lao Communist forces, supported by the Chinese Communists and North Vietnamese, have seized Nam Tha and other towns in northern Laos, in a drive that has carried them all the way to the border of Thailand. At this very moment, Communist forces are threatening the capture of the Royal capital of Luang Prabang and the administrative capital of Vientiane.

There are reports that, as a result of the massive and flagrant violations of the armistice by the Communists, the administration is now reconsidering its position on Laos. I earnestly hope that this is so. I earnestly hope that the measures already announced in Vietnam and in Thailand will be followed by still further measures already specifically geared to the situation in Laos. I earnestly hope that we will not accept this new act of aggression in Laos as a fait accompli and force our friends in Laos into a coalition government against this background.

I am in wholehearted agreement with the distinguished Senator from Washington [Mr. JACKSON], who said several days ago that he would prefer a partitioned Laos to a united Laos governed by a coalition government.

We already have two Korea's, two Germany's, two Vietnam's. And no one could possibly be happy at the prospect of seeing another country partitioned. But we are in the unpleasant position where we are compelled to choose the lesser of two evils. And, recognizing this, there is no doubt in my own mind that

partition would be an infinitely less dangerous evil than a coalition government that is bound to terminate with the Communists in complete control of the country.

I do not think I am revealing any military secret when I say this attitude is shared by many of our own military men, by many of our friends in southeast Asia, and by some of our much-abused friends in Laos. The reason for their preference is obvious. If an anti-Communist government can be maintained in the southern portion of Laos, including the critical Lao panhandle and the Mekong River Valley as far west as Vientiane, and as far north as Luang Prabang, this would protect Cambodia, it would greatly facilitate the struggle against the Vietnamese guerrillas, and it would afford a large measure of protection to Thailand.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. SMITH of Massachusetts in the chair). Does the Senator yield?

Mr. DODD. I am glad to yield to the Senator from New York.

Mr. KEATING. I am sorry to interrupt the Senator, but I have an engagement which is going to take me from the Chamber, and I did not want to leave without commending the Senator from Connecticut for the extremely informative analysis which he has made of the situation in Laos and southeast Asia. He has recently traveled there extensively.

As I understand the Senator—and he may correct me if I am wrong—his feeling is that Laos and southeast Vietnam Province are indivisible and are not completely separate in character.

Mr. DODD. The Senator is correct. The Senator understands very clearly what I have said. That is my view.

Mr. KEATING. I remember the Senator's warning which he sounded some

time ago, perhaps as much as a year ago.

Mr. DODD. I believe the Senator refers to the speech I made in the Senate just about 1 year ago on the same subject.

Mr. KEATING. And at that time he made it very clear, as I remember, that it was, in the opinion of many Senators, and in the opinion of many military men, capable of being relieved and defended from Communist onslaught.

Mr. DODD. The Senator is correct in his recollection. In addition, I tried to point out that our SEATO friends in that part of the world were anxious and willing to assume that responsibility.

Mr. KEATING. That judgment of the Senator coincided with the one I formed at that time. We have now drawn a line. It is sometimes stated in the press reports as being a line in Laos. The Mekong River is virtually the line between Laos and Thailand, and such a line would involve only a tiny peninsula in Laos on our side of the Mekong River.

Mr. DODD. The Senator is right.

Mr. KEATING. To draw a line there is virtually to abandon Laos, at least militarily. Does not the Senator agree with that conclusion?

Mr. DODD. Yes; I do agree, completely.

Mr. KEATING. It seems to me our policies leave a good deal to be desired in that regard. One thing that has disturbed me—and the Senator from Connecticut has been giving eloquent voice to a lot of thoughts that have been going through my mind—is the press reports of the situation in Laos. We hear it all the time, and it seems to me they must be stimulated by some elements in the Department of State. They speak of the official government of Laos as rightwing elements, as if they were extremists, and the moderates as consisting of so-called

neutralists, which consist of neutralists plus the Communists.

Mr. DODD. The Senator is quite right. That fact has been disturbing me.

Mr. KEATING. Instead of saying that the Government of Laos is being overrun, they say the rightwing elements have been overrun.

Mr. DODD. I have been noticing it for some time. It is very unfair and very untruthful. It would be far more accurate if Boun Oum and General Phoumi were referred to as government officials. If we are going to call them anything at all, we should call them the anti-Communist forces. That is what they are.

Mr. KEATING. That is correct. Souvanna Phouma, certainly, according to the past record, has shown much more friendliness to the Communist cause than he has toward the western cause.

Mr. DODD. That is correct.

Mr. KEATING. He is a neutral like some of the neutrals to whom we have been giving aid—a neutral in favor of the Soviet Union and a neutral against the United States.

Mr. DODD. That is correct.

Mr. KEATING. I express the hope that every Member of the Senate will read the entire speech of the Senator from Connecticut, as I shall certainly do. It seems to me he is making a very significant speech. I stand 100 percent behind the President, as the Senator has said he stands—

Mr. DODD. Indeed, I do.

Mr. KEATING. In taking a position on the Mekong River; but that is not the whole situation, and the Senator has brought that out most forcefully in his remarks today.

Mr. DODD. I am encouraged by the Senator's remarks. I am well aware that this is a subject which many persons do not like to discuss. However, it is a critical question, and the fate of the free world could very well be decided in the

struggle in Southeast Asia, and our security could be seriously affected. It is why I have spoken out today.

Mr. KEATING. This is the most important problem which we face today in this country. The speech the Senator is giving is one of the most significant I have heard.

Mr. DODD. I thank the Senator for the compliments he has accorded me.

President Diem has, from the beginning, taken the stand that if we are not prepared to make the effort to save the whole of Laos, we should, out of respect for the security of southeast Asia, at least make the more limited military effort that would be necessary to secure the southern portion of Laos. I discussed this matter with President Diem in the course of a 2-hour conference in Saigon, just over 1 year ago—to be precise on Wednesday, May 3. I still have the map which he used to illustrate his presentation.

President Diem proposed that SEATO paratroops be used to secure the town of Tchepone, in the Lao panhandle, and several other key centers in the area that were still in the hands of the Lao Government forces. He warned that control of the panhandle would give the Communists a vastly greater common frontier with Vietnam and that this would enable them to step up their guerrilla activities proportionately.

Three days later, on Saturday, May 6, I learned in Bangkok that Tchepone had fallen to the Communists the previous day.

Less than a month later a series of items which appeared in the press indicated that Tchepone had already been converted into a major base for Communist guerrilla operations against South Vietnam. Today, Tchepone has become the southern terminal of the so-called Ho Chi Minh trail, the land route over which the North Vietnamese Communists send most of their equipment and guerrillas into South Vietnam. It

has also become one of the chief receiving points for the Ilyushin transports which daily deliver tons of military supplies to the Vietnamese and Lao Communist forces.

A year ago there were 10,000 Communist guerrillas in South Vietnam. Today there are estimated to be in excess of 25,000. To offset this formidable increase in strength, we have had to pay for a substantial increase in the Vietnamese armed forces, we have had to send in more than 5,000 American boys as instructors and pilots, we have now committed another 5,000 troops to Thailand, and we are warned that we may have to play an even larger and more active role in the antiguerrilla war if South Vietnam is to remain free.

This is the price we have to pay and will be called upon to pay for our failure to keep Tchepone and southern Laos out of Communist hands. But, since I do not accept the thesis that every Communist victory must be regarded as sacrosanct, I believe that measures still can and should be taken to force the Communists out of Tchepone and out of the panhandle, and to establish a defense perimeter along the mountain ranges to the north. No measure open to us would do more to relieve the situation in South Vietnam and restore our prestige in southeast Asia. No measure open to us would do more to fortify our position in the negotiations with the Communists and to create the possibility of an acceptable compromise in Laos.

I do not underestimate the risks or the potential costs of attempting to repair the situation in Laos by making partition rather than a coalition government the chief objective of our diplomacy. But I think it would be far more dangerous to underestimate the cost of failing to undertake this repair. Every time we postpone dealing with a situation, every time we yield new ground to the Communists in the name of avoiding escalation, we make it that much

more difficult to stand fast next time, we further encourage the arrogance of the Communists, and we increase the danger of the global war we wish to avoid.

Miss Marguerite Higgins, in the article to which I have already referred, quoted an Asian diplomat as saying:

If the United States dares not act at a time when Red China is in turmoil and starving, when America has the atomic bomb and Red China has not, what will America do when China is recovered and is an atomic power? If you dare not stand up to the Communists in Asia today, what will happen tomorrow?

Mr. President, I have made this statement with some reluctance, because in a time of crisis, even the most sincere and constructive criticism may be misunderstood. Indeed, there have been many times in recent months when I have felt constrained to speak out about the situation in Laos; but until today I have yielded to another feeling which urged me to defer my statement.

If I have spoken today, it is because time is running out in Laos; because I am convinced that the coalition government formula in Laos can only lead to disaster; and because I feel conscience bound to speak out while the situation can still be remedied.

I have been encouraged to speak out by the knowledge that the wisdom of our policy in Laos has in recent months been questioned by some of our ablest political commentators, and by some of our most distinguished editorial columns, among them the columns of the New York Times.

But I have been encouraged to speak out, above all, because the administration, in its recent actions and commitments, has displayed flexibility and courage and a willingness to meet changing situations with changes in policy.

My complaint is not one of harsh criticism. It is, rather, uttered almost in the sense of a prayer that there will be a reconsideration of our policy in this fateful part of the world, with respect to the troubles which beset it.

There is no reason to despair about the situation in southeast Asia. There is every reason to be hopeful. The Chinese Communists do not have the total freedom of action they pretend to have. Their regime has never been weaker economically or more plagued by political disaffection. On the other hand, the presence of American troops in both Vietnam and Thailand gives us a political and diplomatic leverage which we have not heretofore possessed. And our entire position in the area has been further bolstered by the commitment of the other SEATO nations to dispatch contingents of troops which will take their places alongside the American troops already in Thailand.

But, having thus bolstered our position, having thus increased our diplomatic leverage in the negotiations to which we are committed, I hope that we will not passively accept the flagrant Communist violation of the cease-fire at Nam Tha, as we have passively accepted such violations in the past. Every time we fail to react to Communist violations of existing agreements or limit our reactions to paper protests, we encourage the Communists to believe that they can violate any agreement with the free world with total impunity, we make more possible the kind of miscalculation that may someday result in war. I believe, therefore, that before we return to the conference table, we should insist that the Communists return to the positions they occupied before the most recent violation of the cease-fire.

In the Laos situation, as it has unfolded to date, one can find all the essential facts about communism, and all the follies and weaknesses of Western policy, both writ large.

Here one can see the incredible persistence of the Communists at work; one can see their ruthless application of guerrilla tactics, their ability to infiltrate non-Communist groupings like the Bud-

dhist clergy, their cunning use of neutralist or ostensibly non-Communist fronts, their use of diplomacy as a screen for further aggression, their ability to paralyze the West by threatening escalation. Here one can see the total perfidy and total amorality which they so awesomely combine with their total dedication to the goal of world communism.

On the Western side, the events in Laos provide us with still another dramatic illustration of our amateurishness in the field of total warfare; of our perennial desire, despite all disappointments, to believe that some kind of accommodation with the Communists is possible; of our willingness, despite their repeated betrayals, to trust their diplomatic promises; of our readiness, despite numerous historic lessons, to foster coalition governments; of the bewitchment which has led us to accept the one-sided rule that the cold war must be waged always on the territory of the free world, and never on the territory of the Communist world, no matter how recently this territory may have been annexed.

If we persist in this sentimentality and these ambiguities that have up until now characterized our policy in Laos, then the positions remaining to the free world will be overrun or eroded, one by one, under the unrelenting attacks of world communism.

But if we now learn the lessons of Laos and apply them to the world situation, it will, I am confident—at least, it can, I am confident—mark a turning point in the cold war. Once we have digested these lessons, Laos can be saved and southeast Asia can be saved. But far more important, we will never again make the mistake of retreating before a Communist challenge, in the hope that this will somehow ease tensions and reduce the danger of war. Because it does just the opposite.

We will, on the contrary, move to the total mobilization of resources and ener-

gies and spirit that alone can assure the triumph of our free society in the life and death struggle with the godless forces of communism.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the *RECORD* at this place a number of articles from American newspapers and magazines, which will serve to indicate how widespread are the misgivings about the policy we are at present pursuing in Laos.

There being no objection, the articles were ordered to be printed in the *RECORD*, as follows:

[From the New York Times, May 12, 1962]
NEW LOOK AT LAOS

The spreading military crisis in Laos compels the American Government to take a new look at this tiny but strategically important kingdom and to review its whole policy with a view toward more forceful action to keep it out of Communist hands.

The crisis has been simmering ever since the Geneva conference of 1954 which was supposed to settle everything but merely led to continued intermittent fighting in Laos and one military coup after another. It reached its present stage when the combined neutralist and Communist forces, aided by Soviet Russia, Communist China and Communist North Vietnam, broke the latest year-old cease-fire agreement and launched a new offensive that has overrun several strongholds of the pro-Western Government and placed all northwest Laos under Communist control.

This development has put pro-Communist forces on the Mekong River, where they can menace Thailand, and is opening a new route for Communist invasion of embattled South Vietnam.

President Kennedy declared three months ago that if the cease-fire were broken we would be faced with "most serious decisions." But the Government clings to its present policy, agreed upon between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev at Vienna, which calls for a neutral and independent Laos under a coalition regime formed of pro-Western, neutralist and Communist factions. It has joined Britain in calling on Soviet Russia to stop the Communist offensive and has induced Prince Souvanna Phouma, whom it backs as a neutralist Premier, to call for a Communist withdrawal.

It has little hope that the Communists will really surrender what they hold. It does hope for restoration of the cease-fire and resumption of the dragging coalition negotiations between the three princes heading the three rival factions who view it all

as a family affair to be settled in Lao fashion. The American policy is based on Washington's belief that the Lao are uninterested in political or ideological conflicts and, in contrast to the Vietnamese, will not fight. But to back up that policy and force the pro-Western leaders into the coalition with the Communists, even to surrender the army and police, which they refuse, American authorities have tended to undercut the pro-Western Government, even to accuse it of provocation, until this policy begins to resemble that which lost China.

On the other hand, the only grim alternative is massive military aid from the outside, which might trigger a larger conflict. President Kennedy is rightly loath to embark on such a policy, but SEATO and ANZUS, which are pledged to joint protection of the area, should also have their say.

[From the New York Times, May 14, 1962]

APRES LAOS LE DELUGE
(By Marguerite Higgins)

WASHINGTON.—Laos is far away, but the world is small and never in this writer's 20 years as a journalist has the Department of State put on a more stalwart exhibition of sticking its head firmly in the sand than was the case last week with regard to the crisis in southeast Asia.

A government, of course, has a far more embarrassing time than an individual in admitting that it has been played for a fool. That the United States has been played for a fool was evident in Washington firstly from events in Laos, where Red troops led by Hanoi and Red-Chinese trained officers were ferociously giving the lie to the Harriman doctrine that Moscow really didn't want a Communist takeover in Laos and would restrain their Russian-supplied allies. It was evident from the small, smug smiles of the Communist statesmen and journalists in Washington who were patronizingly telling the subdued and silent non-Communist set that—in the words of one Soviet bloc official—"the New Frontier never really set much store by Laos anyway, so how could you consider it a setback?" It was evident from the cold indifference with which Moscow heard out Washington's pleas to live up to pledges to support the cease-fire.

But it was not evident to the State Department up to and through Friday evening, at least in the official line being given out to the world press.

Up to and through Friday evening, the official doctrine was still that a peaceful solution was possible because the Russians really wanted a neutral and independent Laos to limit Peking's influence there.

In its remarkable display of refusing to face unpleasant facts, the State Department clung to its Moscow-is-sincere line in the face of the following:

1. An agreement between the Red Chinese and the Pathet Lao puppet Red government

that Peiping would build a road from China to Red "governmental" headquarters in Laos. This was announced more than 3 months ago. It logically raised the question of how Moscow, sincere or not, could be counted on to keep Peiping out of Laos since the agreement brought the roadbuilders very much in. The State Department answer was that the Chinese were not conclusively in Laos despite the agreement.

2. Clear evidence that the Viet Minh cadres leading the Pathet Lao have been trained and supplied by Peiping as well as by Russia.

3. Reports from American military advisers that Red Chinese troops were seen participating in the attack on Muong Sing (the jungle headquarters or Dr. Tom Dooley). This brought the comment from the State Department that many tribesmen in the area spoke Chinese, overlooking the fact that even Chinese-speaking Lao are not ordinarily in Red army uniform.

4. The fact that Souvanna Phouma, the neutralist prince who was America's choice as the strong man of the coalition government, called on his ally, the Red prince, to halt his attacks and evacuate Nam Tha and was in turn made a fool of when the Communists thrust instead 100 miles to the Thailand border.

Only one thing has stood between Laos and Communist seizure in this and previous administrations, and that has never been the Lao army. If anything, the free Lao army was far weaker in the days of the Eisenhower administration than now. The only thing that has saved Laos has been Red fear of the consequences, meaning possible American or other intervention.

The Kennedy administration's distaste for the Lao situation has been shown in ways too myriad to detail here, but certainly Moscow is not without reasons for gambling that a Red takeover of Laos would be without painful consequences. Indeed, as late as Friday, the State Department was saying that the alerting of the 7th Fleet was "just for show." Only Saturday did someone realize that labeling this alert in such a manner was most unlikely to impress the Communists as anything other than a green light to aggress with safety.

Is it too late to save anything in Laos? Already the entire Lao-Chinese frontier is under Red domination, meaning that Peiping troops can go and come at will without the West being the wiser, as was the case in North Korea along the Yalu.

Already—and for the first time—Red troops are on Thailand's border.

Said an Asian diplomat: "If the United States dares not act at a time when Red China is in turmoil and starving, when America has the atomic bomb and Red China has not, what will America do when China is recovered and is an atomic power? If you dare not stand up to the Communists in Asia today, what will happen tomorrow?"

[From the New York Herald Tribune, Apr. 23, 1962]

MAD HATTER'S TEA PARTY

(By Joseph Alsop)

VIENTIANE, LAOS.—The best way to understand the present stage of American policy in this distracted little country is to remember the worst moment of the Mad Hatter's tea party in "Alice." This, beyond doubt, was the moment when the Mad Hatter rather crossly tried to stuff the dormouse into the teapot.

The role of the Mad Hatter is being played, with considerable panache, by the Assistant Secretary of State for the East, Gov. Averell Harriman. The dormouse in this peculiar charade is the Lao anti-Communist leader, Gen. Phoumi Nosavan. And as in "Alice," the dormouse has refused to be stuffed—at least as yet.

It is not all so comic, however. Consider, for example, Governor Harriman's last descent on Laos, which was intended to stuff the dormouse into the teapot by main force.

At a meeting with all the leaders of the present anti-Communist government, Governor Harriman explained the salubrious character of the teapot in question. This is a neutral coalition government which the Governor desires to form, with the neutralist, Prince Souvanna Phouma, at its head, with Lao Communists included in the Cabinet and with the anti-Communists also included—but only and above all after the anti-Communists have surrendered their vital control of both the army and the police.

After expatiating on the teapot, Governor Harriman gave a preliminary shove. The economic subsidy of \$3 million a month, which the United States has long paid to Laos, was suspended some time ago as a pressure move. This has already caused inflation here. But other pressure moves were easily possible, the Governor reminded the Lao Cabinet, thus hinting at future suspension of military aid as well.

Governor Harriman looked at the Lao leaders one by one; pointed a stern forefinger at each of them in turn; and told them that he wished them to know they would be "responsible for the destruction of their country" if they refused to do his bidding. There was a brief silence, and General Phoumi then replied:

"You know, Governor Harriman, we in Laos have many years' experience of colonial rule. But we were never spoken to in quite that fashion in the colonial times."

It can be seen, then, that rather passionate feelings have by now been generated on both sides. Yet the American policy here most urgently needs cool, dispassionate re-examination.

The existing policy was somewhat hastily adopted at the low ebb of the Kennedy administration, just after the Cuban debacle. The aim was to secure a strictly neutral Laos, with no North Vietnamese Communist troops on Lao soil, and with the North

Vietnamese blocked from using Laos as a transit route for their attack on South Vietnam.

At Geneva last spring, with his customary industry and ability, Governor Harriman negotiated an agreement with the Soviets which on paper, at least, promised the desired neutral Laos. All the requirements for strict Lao neutrality were to be met, as soon as a coalition, all-party government could be installed with Prince Souvanna Phouma at its head. The Chinese and North Vietnamese delegates at Geneva gave their assent; and the Soviet delegate made important personal commitments to Governor Harriman.

At this stage, last summer, the agreement that Governor Harriman had negotiated looked like the best American bet in Laos, even though it was obviously a longshot bet. Any contraption basically depending on Communist good faith must always be a long-shot bet. But its real flaw was its dependence on stuffing the dormouse into the teapot.

Prince Boun Oum, the Prime Minister, and General Phoumi, the real leader of the anti-Communist government, never felt enthusiasm for the coalition teapot. But they would have entered, nonetheless, if the price of the coalition had not been their surrendering control of the police and the army. Such a surrender, they understandably considered, was tantamount to cutting their own throats with a blunt knife.

For just this reason, despite month after month of maneuvering and mounting pressure, the dormouse has obstinately refused to be stuffed. Meanwhile, the passage of time and changing circumstances have transformed what used to be a reasonable long-shot bet into a totally indefensible gamble.

A Chinese Communist general, thinly disguised as a consul general, has turned up in the northern province of Phong Saly, at the head of a division of Chinese troops rather better disguised as roadbuilders. The Communist North Vietnamese have been pushing in troops, until they now have between 12,000 and 14,000 soldiers in Laos, of which half are in regular army battalions. The transit routes to South Vietnam, which were supposed to be abandoned, have been persistently used and improved.

For these and many other reasons, if the Lao anti-Communists are now driven, by main force, into the coalition that has been so eagerly promoted, it will be equivalent to handing Laos to the North Vietnamese with a red ribbon prettily tied around it. No doubt this can be done, by withdrawing U.S. military aid, for instance, which Governor Harriman apparently told the British Ambassador here that he intended to recommend. But it is certainly time to stop and think again.

[From U.S. News & World Report]

UNITED STATES "GIVING AWAY" LAOS TO COMMUNISTS?

VIENTIANE, LAOS.—At a time when U.S. troops are at the brink of war against Communists in South Vietnam, U.S. officials are cracking down on the rulers of neighboring Laos to force them into partnership with their Communist enemies.

U.S. policy—agreed to with Russia—is to try to bring peace to Laos by setting up a coalition Government of "neutrals," anti-Communists and Communists.

To try to force the coalition, the United States cut off a \$3 million monthly subsidy that met the Lao Army's payroll and paid a third of the costs of the police and civil government. Then the United States began preparations to cut off shipments of arms, ammunition and gasoline, to be followed by withdrawal of military advisers and an end to the airlift on which most of the Laotian Army depends for food and ammunition.

The Laotian Government—headed by Prince Boun Oum and Gen. Phoumi Nosa-van—is trying to hold out against American pressure. General Phoumi, at the start of May, was appealing to anti-Communist countries in Asia—Thailand, South Vietnam, the Philippines, Nationalist China, South Korea and Malaya—to come to his aid in his battle against the Reds.

VICTORY FOR REDS?

But the odds now are that Laos will either be controlled completely by the Communists or be split across the middle into a Communist North and an anti-Communist South.

General Phoumi is a tough leader who does not want to turn his country over to the Communists. But the only alternative, as he now sees it, is a divided Laos. He knows he has no chance of reconquering the Communist-held areas in the North without U.S. intervention. Phoumi believes, however, that he can hold the vital Mekong River valley and Southern Laos, if the United States will reverse its present policies and help him.

Actually, the anti-Communists in Laos are not as weak as they once seemed to be. The Royal Lao forces now number 70,000 men. During the past year, the United States has given basic American-style training to most of the troops, and has sent 4,000 officers and technicians through special schools.

In addition, about 11,000 Meo hill tribesmen living in enclaves deep behind the Communist "lines" have been armed and trained by the U.S. Army's Special Forces. Officers say the Meos are superb guerrillas.

Americans who have served at the front with Lao troops say flatly that their combat capability has improved tremendously, that morale is higher than it was a year ago, and that—at the present time—the Royal Lao Army could hold its own against the enemy forces inside Laos.

The neutralist-Communist forces, combined, have 36,000 to 38,000 troops in the field. But they are by no means unified in their objectives, nor are they subject to a single command.

IN 1961: A DECISION

Judging from the information available in Laos, Thailand and South Vietnam the United States has not reassessed the situation in Laos since the spring of 1961, when the Kennedy administration apparently decided the best way out was to neutralize the Red-menaced country.

So far as anyone here knows, Washington has not tried to find out if conditions have changed since then. No top-level mission from Washington has taken a look at the situation. Meanwhile, officers on the ground say that several important assumptions on which U.S. policy was based have turned out wrong.

For example, it was assumed that the Communists and neutrals would overrun Laos in a matter of days unless a coalition government that included them was set up. In fact, the reverse has happened. In order to maintain Red power, Communist North Vietnam has had to send in new battalions of its most experienced troops.

Another assumption was that Laos could be effectively policed to see that it was not used as a base for aggression against any other country in southeast Asia. But no one, so far, has been able to enforce a ceasefire in Laos. Communist North Vietnam has put 10 identified battalions into the fighting area.

The Communists now have a stranglehold on the supply corridor through Laos that connects North and South Vietnam. The Russians airlift supplies to Tchepone, close to the South Vietnam border, and have one other major airdrop zone. Even the most optimistic Westerners in Vientiane now acknowledge that, under a coalition government, there would be no possible way of policing this corridor and preventing supplies from reaching the Communists in South Vietnam.

Still another assumption was that the Royal Lao Government was ineffective. In fact, many Americans on the scene say the Phoumi government is the best that Laos has ever had. U.S. aid was being used effectively right up to the moment that economic sanctions were applied by Washington. A program of technical aid and refugee assistance costing the United States \$6 million a year is still in operation and is having considerable impact in the villages.

FOR UNITED STATES: FEW FRIENDS

As a result of the pressure from Washington, the United States is in a position right now of having very few friends and admirers in Laos. The Communists and their followers regard America as the "imperialist, capitalist enemy." The neutrals distrust the

United States. And the anti-Communists consider the attempt to squeeze them into partnership with the Reds as a "betrayal."

Commanders in Asia say a factor that apparently has been ignored by the Kennedy administration is this: How determined are the Communists to take Laos, and what are their military capabilities for doing so?

There is no question about their long-range intention. Even the Soviet Union, which has supported the principle of a unified, neutral Laos, wants Laos to be a Communist satellite, in the end. And Laos is even more important to Ho Chi Minh, the Communist ruler of North Vietnam. His dream of controlling the entire Indochina peninsula rests on first getting control of Laos.

PROBLEMS FOR COMMUNISTS

Communist capability is another thing. Right now, the entire Communist-neutralist force is dependent on a Soviet airlift and several weekly truck convoys from North Vietnam.

Red China has an estimated 40,000 troops close to the Laos border. North Vietnam has a combat-experienced army of 350,000. But officers with long experience in Asia doubt that the two countries together could maintain more than 100,000 fighting troops in Laos.

Neither China nor North Vietnam has reserves of food. Chinese highways and railways to the Laos-North Vietnam border are relatively primitive. And the industrial bases to produce the necessities of war are thousands of miles away, in North China and Manchuria.

Field commanders say neither China nor North Vietnam could fight a Korea-style war in Laos. The United States and its allies would also have a difficult problem of supply. But the Mekong River valley and southern Laos would be relatively easy to defend, using a combination of Laotian, Thai and U.S. troops.

"A HEADACHE, BUT—"

So why is the United States threatening to pull out its military support and force Laos into a coalition government that could either split the country or put it into the hands of the Reds? Says one Western official with years of experience in southeast Asia:

"The United States appears to have drawn a firm line against the Reds in South Vietnam. Washington's guarantees to Thailand against outside aggression and internal subversion support the view that the United States is not preparing to pull out of southeast Asia.

"But if U.S. policy is to keep South Vietnam and Thailand free, abandoning Laos and selling Phoumi 'down the river' makes no sense. Laos, underpopulated and shy of resources, is a headache to any country that gets involved in it. But it is still the key to defense of Thailand and South Vietnam."

[From the Baltimore Sun, Jan. 9, 1962]

WESTERN CONCESSIONS TO LEFTISTS FEARED

(By Philip Potter)

BANGKOK, THAILAND, January 8.—The United States failure to back Prince Boun Oum of Laos in his efforts to have a say in the choice of Defense and Interior Ministers for a new coalition government there is likely to further erode Thailand's confidence in America.

Thai officials claim to share the West's desire for a strong, peaceful, and neutral Laos, but fear that the West, in its impatience to see an agreement between the three Lao princes to this end, is inclined to make too many concessions to leftwing factions.

BOUN OUM BACKED

Boun Oum, they contend, is right in wanting more positive indication that Prince Souvanna Phouma, neutralist ticketed for the premiership, will maintain a strict neutrality between East and West.

Thai have no faith at all in the neutrality of the third prince in the Lao equation, Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the pro-Communist Neo Lao Hak Xat Party.

They are inclined to risk the formation of a coalition government headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma, but consider the composition of the cabinet the real test of his ability to create a balanced neutralism in the country.

CAUTION URGED

The West should be chary, in the eyes of these officials, about criticizing pro-Western Prince Boun Oum, present Premier of the Royal Lao Government, as he bargains with Souvanna Phouma over the two important Ministries of Defense and Interior.

"Western impatience for an agreement is a sign of weakness," said one official.

"The Vientiane Government of Prince Boun Oum has said it needs a short interim to make sure that Souvanna Phouma can be a strong neutral personality, able to cope with his friends on the left."

This source said Thailand wanted to see a quick settlement among the three princes, but it must be a just and equitable agreement, not dictated from the outside.

"If one side is not happy, and particularly the one the West supports, no agreement can be properly implemented," this official said.

"We feel the West is prone to put pressures on its friends, but not on the other side. You pressure the wrong people at the wrong time. The West kicked little a few months back when Prince Souphanouvong refused to come and see King Savang Vathana, but there is much tendency to blame Boun Oum for demanding a voice in naming the defense and interior ministers."

There also is resentment here over alleged misrepresentation of Thailand's position by the Western press.

Officials said there had been many reports that Thailand advocated strong military action by the western powers in Laos.

This, it was said, is far from the truth.

Thailand, one top official said, has always had a peace policy "however much sympathy it has for Laos, because of geographical proximity and our common cultural heritage."

Thailand's hope, he said, was for a strong, neutral Laotian Government supported by the people and by King Savang Vathana.

VIEWS ACCEPTED

He said the view was accepted that it would have to be composed of all factions, but the West must insist that it be one which will maintain—with emphasis on "maintain"—strict neutrality.

"What we do not want is a government purported to be neutral, but with no ability nor willingness to remain neutral."

"We do not want one predominantly Communist or leftist. We fear if the balance is not right it will not be a good beginning and it may lead to eventual domination by undesirable elements."

To assure this, he said, the West must achieve unity and be resolute in standing more firmly for "what you say you believe in. Our fear is that the West, in its strong desire for agreement, might be willing to grant too many concessions. This is a bargaining game. If you say what you are willing to give you have no resources to fall back on."

There is clearly a belief in Thailand that partition of Laos along the lines of present military control would be more advantageous to this country than the formation there of a government that would come under Communist control and expose Thailand's 625-mile border with Laos to penetration by Communist agents armed and trained by Communist North Vietnam and Red China.

Officials here point out that in recent months there has been widespread trouble in Thailand's northeast province bordering Laos and say "there is every indication it is inspired by elements outside the kingdom."

While it is nothing like the Communist Viet Cong threat in South Vietnam, it was said, subversion probably would mount if Laos were to become a subsatellite of the Communist bloc.

RED FORCE MENTIONED

There still reside in northeast Thailand about 30,000 North Vietnamese who came over and made it a base for operation against the French during the early years of the Indochina war.

They still owe allegiance to Ho Chih Minh, Communist leader of North Vietnam, and only await the elimination of Laos as a buffer state to become a large fifth column in this country.

There were at one time 60,000 men, women, and children, but for the past 2 years there have been evacuations through the instrumentality of the International Red Cross and the number here now is believed to be between 30,000 and 40,000.

American sources say those evacuated have been mostly old women and children, leaving

in Thailand a hard core as potential subversives of the Viet Cong type now operating in South Vietnam.

SYMPATHY NOTED

U.S. officials here are sympathetic about Thailand's fears.

Americans, one said, "may view Laos like a revolving door, in which one goes in and out, but it is deeply involved in the emotions, heart, and thinking of the Thai. There is an umbilical connection between the Thai and the Lao."

Thus, he said, there is much questioning here about the determination of the West to protect Laos and South Vietnam against Communist subversion and aggression.

"They are heartsick over the fact that the Communists have been allowed to take over half of Laos. They simply cannot understand why the West is letting this happen," he said, "They say it will be Laos first, South Vietnam second, and Thailand third and does the West care anymore?"

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Feb. 24, 1962]

NORTH VIETNAMESE—LAOS SEES RED UNITS (By Takashi Oka)

VIENTIANE, LAOS.—While political leaders representing the three contending factions in Laos discuss how to achieve a national coalition government, military observers here are increasingly concerned over evidence of North Viet Namese regular battalions in areas controlled by the pro-Communist Pathet Lao and by forces of neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma.

Information collated by Western sources here indicates that at least 10 North Vietnamese battalions totaling 5,000 men are on Lao soil. An additional 5,000 North Vietnamese are believed to be serving in communications, artillery, and antiaircraft units and to form cadres and advisers in existing Pathet Lao and Souvanna Phouma units.

Positive identification of North Vietnamese units has always been difficult but military observers are fairly certain that two North Vietnamese battalions are in the Plain of Jars region, two in the Nam Tha region, one in the Vang Vieng region, two in the Nhommarat-Mahaxay region, and one in the Tchepone region.

REPORTS CHECKED

The current dry season makes both aerial and ground observation easier than during the dank spring and summer monsoon, and military sources say they have carefully checked testimony of defectors with observation by guerrillas from among the Meo tribesmen and reconnaissance from the air.

Two areas where pro-Communist forces appear to be much stronger than a year ago are Nam Tha in the north, and the north-south route from Nhommarat through Mahaxay to Tchepone. The former is just south of the Chinese Communist border while the

latter composes the famous Ho Chi Minh route from North to South Vietnam.

The Pathet Lao advance in the Nam Tha area not only threatens the provincial capital of Nam Tha but brings almost all of the 243-mile roadless border between Laos and Communist China into pro-Communist hands. The Chinese 13th Army with 25,000 men is believed to be just across the border in the so-called Shishong Banna Thai autonomous area, and could move into Laos undetected by outsiders once the Pathet Lao had secured most of the border area, an exercise in which they may be more interested than the capture of Nam Tha town itself.

SUPPLY ROUTE

The Mahaxay-Tchepone route is believed to be serving as a supply road down which men and material move from North Vietnam to participate in the guerrilla war in South Vietnam. The Pathet Lao have improved the trail from Mahaxay to Tchepone and trucks have been observed driving down to a point halfway between the two towns. This means that supplies moving south need to be portered only from this halfway point to Tchepone and thence to the Lao-Vietnamese border.

In addition, the Tchepone airfield has been improved and now can take Soviet Ilyushin-14's. Almost one ton of supplies daily or 20 tons per month are being airlifted by Soviet transport planes to Tchepone and the airfield there is ringed with radar-equipped antiaircraft guns which are accurate enough to hit high-flying observation planes.

There is no solid evidence that North Vietnamese troops in Tchepone, Mahaxay, and Nam Tha have been used in actual combat. Military observers believe they are being held in reserve and that their mere presence causes such panic among Lao units opposing them that the latter often turn and flee without giving battle.

TROOPS RETREATED

Last month Vientiane troops loyal to the Defense Minister, Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, moved against the Pathet Lao both in the Mahaxay area and in Muong Sai area south of Nam Tha. In both areas Vientiane troops beat a hasty retreat the minute they realized that North Vietnamese battalions were in the vicinity.

Trucking and equipment of Vientiane forces have improved since the disastrous days preceding the cease-fire last spring. But they still have a tendency to avoid close combat and their capacity to wage a coordinated operation leaves something to be desired, according to observers who have accompanied troops in some of the recent fighting.

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Mar. 9, 1962]

LAO FACTIONS VIE FOR GRIP (By Takashi Oka)

VIENTIANE, LAOS.—It takes only 45 minutes by twin-engine Beechcraft to go from this

dusty administrative capital of Laos to the rolling Plain of Jars where Prince Souvanna Phouma's neutralist government has its headquarters at the former French Foreign Legion outpost of Khang Khay.

But Vientiane and Khang Khay are worlds apart. Compared with Bangkok or Saigon, Vientiane is a sleepy little upcountry town; compared with desolate Khang Khay, it is a veritable metropolis.

American military and economic aid, which so far has not stopped—despite the withholding of the February and March monthly aid checks—supporting the Laos civil and military budget, is enlarging the runway at Wattay Airport and building a modern highway to Thadua, transshipment point across the Mekong River for goods coming in from Thailand.

SHARP CONTRAST

Inside the city, the rightwing government headed by Prince Boun Oum and Defense Minister Phoumi Nosavan—temporarily convalescing in Thailand—is widening roads, reconstructing the royal palace, and building a monument in front of the Government buildings. Shops still are filled with imported goods, and one indication of the moral standard is that alcoholic beverages are cheaper than in Bangkok or Saigon.

Khang Khay, by contrast, has the spartan atmosphere of an army boot camp. Civil servants have their offices in central rooms of barrack-long buildings and sleep dormitory style in cots placed in the end of the rooms. They bathe in discarded oil drums, bark orders into field telephones, and ride from outpost to outpost in trucks or army command cars.

They use some jeeps of American manufacture, but most of their vehicles bear the export label "Fait en Urss" (made in U.S.S.R.) or its Russian equivalent.

Prince Souvanna Phouma's government does not conceal the fact that its materiel support comes exclusively from the Communist bloc, particularly from the Soviet Union and North Vietnam.

ARMED BY REDS

During a recent visit, this correspondent hitchhiked on a Soviet plane from the Plain of Jars Airfield to Pongsavan and from there on a Soviet-made command car to Khang Khay, where North Vietnamese carpenters and other laborers are building a meeting hall and a hotel. Soviet and Czech military equipment is in evidence at military installations, while the Chinese Communists are building a road from their border to the northern town of Phongsaly.

But politically the Souvanna Phouma government insists it is neutralist—that it looks neither to the United States nor to the Soviet Union for support but hopes to bring about a Laos whose neutrality will be guaranteed by all major powers. Thus it draws distinction between itself and the American-supported Vietiane government—

as well as the Communist-supported Pathet Lao under Prince Souvanna Phouma's half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, who has his headquarters in Samneua but who spends much of his time in Khang Khay.

Internationally, Prince Souvanna Phouma has won United States, British, French, and Soviet backing for an attempt to evolve an all-Lao neutralist coalition that will bring together both Pathet Lao and Vietiane forces under himself as Premier, with 10 Cabinet seats going to his own group and four each to Vietiane and the Pathet Lao.

Under this formula, Prince Souvanna Phouma's adherents will take the key posts of Defense and Interior in addition to the Premier post and Foreign Affairs.

But the prerequisite for such an evolution is, of course, the genuineness of Prince Souvanna Phouma's neutrality. As weeks turn into months and months to years since coalition efforts began, the middle position which Prince Souvanna Phouma seeks to hold between Vientiane on the right and the Pathet Lao on left becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Neither does the Pathet Lao make things easier for the Prince.

NEUTRALITY VOICED

"We are not Communists, Prince Souphanouvong told this correspondent during a recent visit to Khang Khay. "We are a party that enjoys the support of Communists. We stand for a peaceful, neutral, and united Laos."

Such language effectively blurs the distinction between the Pathet Lao and Prince Souvanna Phouma and infringes upon the middle ground which is the basis of the Khang Khay government's appeal to Lao opinion and to the world.

Prince Souvanna Phouma's recent bilateral negotiations in Luang Prabang and Vietiane with General Phoumi—to be resumed in a few days—may show that the Khang Khay leader wishes to establish a public image of himself as independent of his half brother, who told me: "I recognize only agreements reached in my presence. I recognize no agreements à deux."

Meanwhile, it isn't clear yet what effect General Phoumi's illness will have on talks between Vietiane and Khang Khay.

So far, Vietiane has not conceded the Defense and Interior portfolios to Prince Souvanna Phouma. It remains to be seen whether U.S. pressure, begun with the stopping of the monthly aid check and perhaps to continue to the cutting off of all military and economic aid, will force this concession.

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Mar. 21, 1962]

RED LAO LEADER AIRS VIEWS TO WEST (By Ronald Stead)

KHANG KHAY, LAOS.—During an interview here in this dusty little capital of "Souvanna Phouma country" this correspondent asked

pro-Communist Prince Souphanouvong about those troops from neighboring North Vietnam which number some 10,000 men—about half of them are in regular combat formations on the pro-Communist side in the Lao civil war.

Prince Souphanouvong shares this rebel capital with his half-brother, neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma. He is the president of the central committee of the Neo Lao Haksat Party, which gives political expression to the pro-Communist Pathet Lao armed forces.

The Prince laughed as he replied, "This is nonsense. You must remember we get uniforms from North Vietnam along with other supplies and our soldiers wearing them obviously look like Vietminh troops since the clothes in question are drawn from stock not specially designed for us."

NO COMMENT

When told the Royal Lao Army's assessment, accepted by the U.S. military group advising it, is based on much more than an observation of uniforms, he made no comment.

The accumulated evidence furnished by prisoners, deserters, refugees, and others, as well as reports on large truck convoys and other indications of reinforcement had further backed the claims.

Improved antiaircraft artillery fire shows the up-to-date range-finding devices now in use by the rebels.

TECHNICAL AID ADMITTED

"We have North Vietnamese, Russian, and Chinese technicians helping in various ways," Prince Souphanouvong declared, "the same way as the illegal government now in power in Vientiane (the royalist capital of Laos) has Americans aiding it on the field of combat and elsewhere."

Armed American specialist soldiers do go into action with formations of the Royal Lao Army. But their orders are only to defend themselves if necessary and to give advice, not orders. Sometimes the command officers to whom they give it take no notice. And on occasion American advisers have found themselves in positions from which the Lao troops they were previously with had unexpectedly retired.

"Tell the American people," said Prince Souphanouvong when the conversation turned to political matters, "the restoration of peace in Laos is now up to the U.S. Government. If Prince Boun Oum (present counterrevolutionary Premier of Vientiane) and Gen. Phoumi Nosavan (strong man in his regime) continue to refuse to agree that the two key portfolios—for Defense and Home Affairs—shall be in neutralist hands in any coalition administration that may be formed, Americans must deny them the help that alone enables them to persist in office.

ALL AID ATTACKED

"Not just by withholding the monthly check of \$3 million that subsidizes them but by withdrawing aircraft and other aid of military significance which makes possible their continuance on a campaign they cannot possibly win.

"If the Americans do not do this they will be responsible for preventing the settlement of problems in Laos by the people of the country themselves. I reminded the Prince of the fears of the non-Communist world that a coalition administration in Laos, if formed, would in due course become dominated by representatives of the pro-Communist Pathet Lao.

"That is for the people of Laos to decide when we have elections again," the Prince said. Then he departed from the French in which the interview was conducted to say slowly in English, "next time the integration must be real.

EXPERIENCE RECALLED

"The last time there was discrimination and vengeance and I, for one, was put in prison for trying to give effect to my political beliefs. Any future fusion has to be the real thing—and I am going to make sure it will be before we try to get together again with our present enemies," he said.

The Pathet Lao chief frowned when told of the impression created at the press conference held by the Minister of Information in Vientiane that neutralist leader Prince Souvanna Phouma is a "prisoner of the Pathet Lao."

He described this as "an odious calumny against the rightful Prime Minister of Laos (Souvanna Phouma) and a maneuver to cause a split between my half-brother's government and the Pathet Lao. It is futile," he added, "because nobody can destroy the firm solidarity forged in the fire of battle."

PEACE TALKED UP

"For this reason American efforts to separate us must be in vain. The Neo Lao Haksat has never deviated from its course of seeking a peaceful solution to the Laos problem" he claimed, "for only in this way can our country be led to peace, neutrality, sovereignty, unity, democracy, and prosperity as envisaged at the 14-nation conference at Geneva which will supervise the withdrawal of all foreign military personnel from Laos when we can send a delegation from a coalition government to sign the accords already reached internationally."

"The world should remember," said Prince Souphanouvong, "that Prince Boun Oum, Prince Souvanna Phouma and myself agreed on a basis for establishing a coalition government during our meetings in Zurich and Geneva. But Prince Boun Oum has done nothing but try to evade those terms and prevent their implementation.

"The latest rightwing proposal for the six administrative commissions instead of a coalition government—under the presidency of the King—is just an attempt to keep power in reactionary hands and use the dignity and prestige of the throne for political ends. We did not countenance it for a second."

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Mar. 23, 1962]

KONG LE: ANGER IN LAOS

(By Ronald Stead)

KHANG KHAY, LAOS.—"I did what I did to open the eyes of the people of Laos and set their feet on the right road," said Capt. Kong Le, catalyst in the creation of the Lao crisis now presenting the world one of its greatest problems.

We talked in his little bedroom at the former French Foreign Legion post here where he commands the neutralist forces in the Lao civil war. They are linked with the pro-Communist Pathet Lao against the country's present rightwing counterrevolutionary government. At this same headquarters, the neutralist leader, Prince Souvanna Phouma, has a joint residence with his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, head the Lao pro-Communists.

Capt. Kong Le's reference was to a coup during the night of August 8, 1960, when he led the Second Paratroop Battalion of the Royal Lao Army to take over the Government and military installations at the city of Vientiane. As chairman of the revolutionary committee he accused the administration it ousted of waging fratricidal war against the Pathet Lao and of allowing American domination and infiltration.

He called upon army commanders to cease operations against the Pathet Lao, declared that the men he put into power would pursue a genuinely neutral policy, stamp out administrative corruption, and requested all foreign troops to leave Laos. At the same time he declared the revolutionary committee loyal to the monarchy of King Savang Vathana, the Constitution, and denied that the pro-Communists' chief, Prince Souphanouvong, was behind the coup.

The National Assembly unanimously passed a vote of no confidence in the deposed Government under the premiership of the pro-American rightwinger Prince Somsanith. The King accepted his resignation and asked Prince Souvanna Phouma—Premier from 1951 to 1954 and again in 1956—to form a new administration.

The same day Capt. Kong Le announced the handing over to Souvanna Phouma of the powers he had assumed. But on September 10 tough rightwing Gen. Phoumi Nosa-van and Prince Boun Oum set up in the southern city of Savannakhet a counter-revolutionary committee which proclaimed the Constitution suspended and formed another government with Boun Oum Premier and General Phoumi Minister of Defense.

In due course the King approved this. General Phoumi's troops marched on Vientiane, Capt. Kong Le withdrew his men after fighting there between December 13 and 16, 1960, and Souvanna Phouma left the country, later to return and install himself at Khang Khay.

The forces of Capt. Kong Le joined those of the Pathet Lao, though retaining separate identities, and when hostilities were suspended by a ceasefire last May 3 the two controlled more than half of Laos.

This brief recapitulation of events in Laos in their purely internal aspect is essential for putting into perspective Capt. Kong Le as an important and symbolic national figure in the picture showing that the Lao Government is aided militarily and otherwise by the United States while the 15,000 men he commands and the 60,000 forming the Pathet Lao forces are backed similarly by the Soviet Union, Communist China, Communist North Vietnam.

The captain is amiable, youthful, and very small in stature. He came back from a liaison meeting with Pathet Lao officers to find this correspondent in his simply furnished bedroom enjoying refreshment provided gracefully by the captain's pretty and petite wife. Ornaments on the desk at the foot of his hardlooking bed indicate perhaps the road he considers it right for the people of Laos to tread now that he has opened their eyes.

Dominating the treasure was a large colored photograph of General Giap, commander in chief of the North Vietnamese Army currently accused by the Lao Government of sending 10,000 men into Laos on the Pathet Lao side in the civil war.

"The general sent me that himself," said the captain proudly.

Beside it was a bas-relief of Ho Chi Minh, President of Communist North Vietnam. And alongside this a statuette of a very fierce looking lion carved out of coal from a North Vietnamese mine. Another relief was of Maj. Yuri A. Gagarin, first man into outer space—next to a group picture of Cuba's Fidel Castro and supporters.

Nearby stood an impressionistic model of a Soviet sputnik given the captain by the Soviet Ambassador to Laos.

Among Capt. Kong Le's books was one on Major Gagarin in which one of the authors, Wilfred Burchett (Australian journalist now residing in Moscow and long operating assiduously in the Communist camp) had written, "To Gen. Kong Le whose name is known throughout the world as a great patriot and who fights for the independence, peace, and neutrality of Laos. With sincere wishes for your further success."

The captain pointed to the second word of this inscription and said, "Mr. Burchett calls me general but I don't call myself that. I'm just Capt. Kong Le."

There was no mistaking the pride with which he enunciated the last three words. At the time he was wearing no insignia on

his uniform except a parachutist's large brass emblem on his right breast.

I am told he generally is described as basically and mostly "an angry young man" without political aspirations.

"That's right," he commented, "and sometimes I am very angry indeed."

He continued, "Americans must cease supporting the rightwingers in our civil war and by denying them military help force them to give up a fight they cannot possibly win if left to themselves."

Forsaking French briefly for English he added "They've had it—and they must get together with us to restore national unity."

Before kindly sending me back in a Soviet-supplied jeep to the nearby village of Phang Savang where I was staying, the captain made this observation in parting:

"Laos must not be a bridgehead for conflicting forces of the world. It must be a bridge between them."

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Mar. 24, 1962]

ROYAL NEGOTIATIONS HANG ON IN LAOS

(By Ronald Stead)

KHANG KHAY, LAOS.—Prince Souvanna Phouma, Premier-designate of the provisional national coalition government, which it so far has been impossible to form despite nearly 6 months' efforts, accorded an interview to this correspondent at the headquarters and residence which he shares here with the leader of the country's pro-Communists, his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong.

It is a former regional command center of the French Foreign Legion, and today's princely occupants have left undisturbed some piquant murals executed by the soldier artists of the former imperial era. Indeed, they added to the murals in the main hall a caricature of paratrooper Capt. Kong Le kicking a soccer football vigorously onto the nose of Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, strong man in the counterrevolutionary administration currently in power at the administrative capital of Prince Boun Ourn, Vietiane.

PREMIER THREE TIMES

Prince Souvanna Phouma, and Prince Souphanouvong have had many political dealings with each other since the former first became Premier of Laos in 1951. He held that position until 1954, acquired it again 2 years later, and was given it yet again in 1960 after Capt. Kong Le's revolutionary coup ousted Prince Somsanith's rightwing pro-American administration.

Prince Souvanna Phouma left the country before Gen. Phoumi Nosavan's troops captured Vientiane in December 1960. However, he was still Premier, and he still considers himself the rightful holder of the premiership. He also considers himself the rightful Minister of Foreign Affairs, which

is why his headquarters here has the title Ministry of Foreign Affairs affixed to the main doorway.

DUST IS THICK

At this time of year the dominating feature of the surrounding landscape on the highly strategic Plain of Jars (so named because some very large ancient inexplicable stone jars stand at assorted angles in one part of the plain) is dust, which follows any fast-moving vehicle like a heavy brown smokescreen from an exhaust pipe.

Although now under constant Communist pressure and feeling increasingly obliged to accept Communist arms, Prince Souvanna Phouma is not Communist, and experienced observers believe him when he says he stands for a policy of real neutrality.

"There has to be an accommodation with Communists, internal and external," said this outstanding Lao statesman, almost the only one with an understanding of the complex international factors governing his country's future.

PRESSURE ON RIGHTWING

Today he and the Lao pro-Communists are entirely agreed on one thing—that the United States, having shifted the weight of its support from the rightwingers to the neutralists in the center, should put more pressure on the rightwingers to do the same and agree to place the two key portfolios in the proposed coalition in the hands of the neutralists. These are the Ministries of Defense and Home Affairs, which control the army and police, respectively.

The rest of the nominated ministers and permanent secretaries are being juggled in the hope (rather forlorn to date) of providing the right, left, and center with a formula that can be accepted by all three. But on defense and home affairs Princes Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong will never give way, the former said.

FEBRUARY COMPROMISE

The attempted compromise that Prince Souvanna Phouma brought back from his last visit to Vientiane February 21 to 26 was one that would give the Ministries of Defense and Home Affairs to him, carrying with them veterans' affairs. He would also allot the Ministry of Social Advancement. The proposal was that as Minister of Defense the Premier would have under him three permanent secretaries: one from the right, one from the left, and one from the center.

Prince Souvanna Phouma indicated that Prince Souphanouvong would be content with the triple portfolio of the Ministries of Information, Sports, and Youth.

Rightwingers, however, would be far from content if the pro-Communist prince had them, and neutralists would prefer that he be Minister of Economy and Planning instead. The suggestion is that he have a rightwing permanent secretary anyway.

OTHER MINISTRIES

The Ministries of Public Works and Transport are envisaged as being under the Minister from Pathet Lao. The Premier's office would be run by neutralists, who would have portfolios for foreign affairs, welfare and labor, health, communications, justice, finance, and religious affairs. Education and fine arts would go to the rightwing, and General Phoumi Nosavan is currently envisaged as Minister of Defense. He could be Deputy Premier if willing to be Minister of Economy and Planning. But he is a very strong person, one interested in power, not in the appearance of it, and he has been stoutly resisting American pressures to make him toe the line.

No ministry has been accorded at present to Prince Boun Oum, Premier in the Vientiane Government, because in the Lao scale of aristocratic precedence, he is second only to the King and must be Premier or nothing.

Another formula of which Prince Souvanna Phouma talked would give 10 posts to neutralists, 4 to rightwingers, 4 to leftwingers, with himself as Premier in a cabinet of 19.

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Apr. 2, 1962]

NEUTRAL AND RED LAOS MEET

(By Ronald Stead)

PHANG SAVAN, LAOS.—This dusty village on the French-named Plaine de Jarres in Laos is news. And news that must be understood in order to appreciate what is going on politically in the little civil war-torn southeast Asian kingdom.

A short way down the unpaved main street from this correspondent's lodgings here are the headquarters of Communist China's Economic and Cultural Mission to Laos. Further along is Czechoslovakia's Economic and Cultural Mission to Laos. And nearby is North Vietnam's Economic and Cultural Mission to Laos.

The Laos referred to is not that of the rightwing government in Vientiane. It is the Laos controlled by that country's neutralists and it is set in the midst of a wider area around here controlled by the country's Communists.

The Communist diplomatic friends of these two Laoses are accredited to Prince Souvanna Phouma. Prime Minister-elect of the new provisional coalition government that rival factions of right, left, and center have been unable to form in 5 months of disagreement.

Souvanna Phouma now has headquarters and joint residence with his half brother, Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the pro-Communist Pathet Lao armed forces and their political counterpart, the Neo Lao Haksat.

The joint residence of the half brothers is only a short ride by automobile from here.

But it is an uncomfortable trip owing to the condition of the roads in this region. It was particularly so for me when visiting the princes at Khang Khay, because the automobile used was a large truck containing only three passengers and two sacks of rice. The second time I came off the seat I landed on one of the sacks and decided to stay there on the floor.

The French influence persists in some ways in Laos, and the rule of the road is to drive on the right. In this part of the country, however, people drive on the left because it is less worn, though the difference is getting harder and harder to detect. The truck driver, a young neutralist soldier, was greatly entertained at journey's end when this correspondent leaped adventurously to the ground and sat down heavily as his travel-shaken knees gave way.

The unexpected arrival was dusted off amid solicitous, if incomprehensible inquiries and he offers this vignette to illustrate not only the kindness and courtesy of the local residents, but also the simple conditions in which they reside. There are no taxicabs nor scheduled buses, and unless private transport is at your disposal the only way to travel is by thumb lift, procedure not recommended after dark.

The first bedroom placed at my disposal was a wooden cubicle obviously built around the bed, leaving a minimum of space for getting into same but a maximum for building another cubicle alongside. But through a chance encounter with Wilfred Burchett—a onetime journalist acquaintance visiting here from Moscow where he lives—I found an apartment that contained not only a bed but also a chair and table, the latter ornamented by a tiny mug turned upside down for a candlestick.

The minor comfort was impaired by the proximity of a public loudspeaker which in true Communist fashion, blared out music, news, exhortation and comment in masculine and feminine voices from early morning onward. This is a most alien addition to the gentle unheeding of the Laos way of life.

The busiest place in Phang Savan, except for headquarters of Lau Pencan [Neutral Laos] party, founded by Souvanna Phouma some 8 months ago, is the restaurant of Ruam Mitr, hotel operated by Monsieur Theo. He is a Belgian formerly in what he describes as a prosperous business in Hanoi, now the capital of Communist-ruled North Vietnam. He takes a somewhat lugubrious view of the present life and times here, and dilated upon the shortage of consumer goods that keeps local shops virtually empty.

Earlier he had stressed the indispensability of an electric torch here if one wishes to make even the shortest expedition after dark in this village without street lighting.

M. Theo happened to have a spare pocket flashlight. And by selling it to me he was able to illustrate quite convincingly how the

cost of living has gone up in this neutralist Laos which is so heavily dependent on Communist protectors.

[From the Evening Star, Apr. 18, 1962]

MISSIONARY SEES NEED FOR U.S. SACRIFICE TO SAVE LAOS

A tall stranger, his khakis sweat-stained, his bare feet covered with mud, entered a Lao village, greeted the inhabitants in their own tongue and sat down to share their simple menu.

This stranger from another world was the first white man ever seen by the inhabitants of the village and of some 40 other Lao villages.

The stranger, the Reverend Mathias Menger, a 30-year-old native of San Antonio, Tex., told here today how, in his first 3 years in Laos, he had walked 5,000 miles to get to know the people he will serve for the rest of his life.

Father Menger, an Oblate missionary, went to Laos, with headquarters in Vientiane, 6 years ago. In January, he returned to the United States for an 8-month visit and will return to Laos in September.

CONQUERED NATIVE FOOD

In an experience remarkably similar to that of the fictitious "Father Finnian" in "The Ugly American," the controversial book about American policy in southeast Asia, Father Menger learned to eat Lao food by suffering through attacks of dysentery until his system had built up its defenses.

"In a few weeks," he said, "I lost 35 pounds."

If Laos is not to become a Communist nation, he said, more Americans will have to make the same kind of sacrifices.

"I understand very well why our people are not going out there to live," he said. "If I were married, I wouldn't go out and live in a jungle."

"We need dedicated people," he added. "No purely human motive is sufficient for a person to live in Laos. If I didn't have a spiritual motive, I wouldn't live there for all the money in the world."

And yet there are people who are willing to live among the people of Laos.

"One of the finest persons I have ever met was a Russian Communist in Laos," Father Menger said. "I asked him how long he was going to stay, assuming that, like our own people, he had a short, definite tour of duty."

"He didn't seem to know what I meant. 'I have come here to make Laos a Communist country,' he told me. 'I will stay until the job is done.'"

Since his return to the United States, Father Menger has delivered 231 lectures, appeared on 30 television programs and been interviewed on nearly that many radio stations.

One of the purposes of the lecture series is to ask for contributions to a \$100,000

fund to build an orphanage—the first in Laos—and a girls' vocational school.

In every one of his lectures, he said, several women have been unable to listen to his descriptions of some of the things he has seen in Laos.

FAMILY TORTURED

A family in Father Menger's pastorate was captured by Communists, who demanded they make a choice between communism and Christianity. When they chose Christianity, a 4-year-old daughter was brutally beaten and thrown in the mud.

When they still refused to renounce Christianity, they were buried in the village square with only their heads protruding. A plow was hitched to a water buffalo and the Communists circled the buried family. When they still refused to become Communists, the plow was run over the members of the family, one by one.

Although he seldom goes out on military patrols, Father Menger frequently works close to the vague front line of the strange Laotian war.

SPIKES KILL

"The Communists bury barbed spikes in the ground," he said, "and then lure their enemies across the mined area."

"One day we were walking in a column and the boy in front of me stepped on one of the spikes. He let out a yell and fell to the ground—on a bed of spikes. It was like falling on a bed of icepicks. He was dead in 2 minutes."

Father Menger clearly feels that Laos is the key to Southeast Asia—and that what is being done now to have it is not enough.

Asked what he thought the odds are that the United States will take effective steps soon enough to save the country, he shook his head and said:

"I know there is no reason why we should lose Laos. But I just don't know whether we will do what needs to be done to avoid it."

[From the New York Herald Tribune,
Apr. 30, 1962]

THAI TO SEND LAO RICE TO EASE "BRUTAL SUSPENSION" OF U.S. AID

VIENTIANE, LAOS.—Royal Government leaders returned from Thailand yesterday with pledges of help to ease the economic impact of what a Lao official called the brutal suspension of U.S. aid.

At the same time, the official, Acting Foreign Minister Sisouk Na Champassak, expressed hope Washington will understand the royal Government's position and reverse U.S. policy.

The United States suspended its \$3 million monthly economic aid to Laos in February, when Premier Prince Boun Oum refused to enter into a coalition regime with neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma as Premier.

The United States insisted this was the only hope for ending the rebellion of the Communist-dominated Pathet Lao guer-

illas. The royal Government feared the Communists eventually would take over from Prince Souvanna.

Mr. Sisouk told reporters the Thai Government, as a first step, has given Laos a grant of 1,000 tons of rice—about enough to supply this administrative capital for 10 days—and will provide other products such as cement.

Mr. Sisouk declined to give details but said, "We have drawn a plan of our needs, and Thai officials promised to consider them within the limits of Thailand's capabilities."

Asked if the U.S. policy of suspending economic assistance was raised during discussions with Thai officials in Bangkok, Mr. Sisouk replied: "The Thai Government doesn't understand this brutal suspension."

HARRIMAN SAW NO AID

A reporter said W. Averell Harriman, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Far East Affairs, had declared after his visit to Laos in March that no southeast Asian government would consider helping Boun Oum's government.

Mr. Sisouk said Mr. Harriman made the statement "after failure of his mission here." Mr. Harriman had come here to try to get the rival factions to negotiate again on a neutral coalition regime.

"The security of Thailand," Mr. Sisouk said, "depends on the security of Laos. Therefore, Thai officials have manifested a lot of sympathy in giving us what we need."

The Government visit to Thailand was the first of several to be made to Asian neighbors seeking support in the dispute with Washington. A delegation will leave Tuesday for South Korea.

[From the New York Times, May 13, 1962]

NEW CRISES LOOM FOR UNITED STATES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA—PERILS FOR THE WEST POINTED UP BY COMMUNIST GAIN IN LAOS—SAIGON FOES STILL HOLD INITIATIVE

(By Robert Trumbull)

TAIPEI, TAIWAN, May 12.—New successes by the pro-Communist rebels in Laos have again underscored the perilous position of the free world in the turbulent and vital southeast Asian region stretching from Saigon on the west to Rangoon on the east and reaching southward to the Indonesian archipelago and New Guinea.

After weighing all the developments, it is hard to find any place in the area where the outlook for the West has brightened in recent days. Disquieting signs are many.

With pro-Communist forces advancing in Laos, our friends in that country and neighboring Thailand are becoming estranged and embittered.

Despite increasingly massive U.S. support to President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, the Communist guerrillas called the Vietcong still hold the initiative in South Vietnam.

Many observers expect the Communists to inspire serious trouble in Singapore over Malaya's plan to absorb that strategic island and neighboring British territories in Borneo into an expanded pro-Western state to be called Malaysia.

Hoping to remain aloof and continue with their own development, nonaligned Burma and Cambodia burrow into their neutralist cocoons.

SOVIET ARMS

Neutralist Indonesia, preparing to attack Netherlands New Guinea in what President Sukarno regards as an "anticolonial" liberation movement, is committing more and more of her resources to the Soviet Union in return for arms.

The United States has attacked the problems in southeast Asia in various ways.

In Laos, Washington is pressing the loyal pro-Western Government of Prince Boun Oum to join in a coalition regime to be headed by neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma. The coalition would include leftist supporters of pro-Communist Prince Souphanouvong.

The U.S. efforts to get Indonesia and the Netherlands to negotiate the New Guinea question have so far yielded little success.

With the new military regime just beginning to find its feet in Burma, an effective U.S. policy at this point seems debatable.

Washington's program in Cambodia is committed to supporting efforts by Prince Norodom Sihanouk's government to raise living standards in this surprisingly progressive Southeast Asian kingdom. American economic aid far outstrips the contributions of the Communist powers to Sihanouk's development plans. Sihanouk maintains his independence of both power blocs.

ECONOMIC AID

The task of American diplomats in Malaya and Singapore is complicated by Washington's programs to release stockpiled tin and rubber, which hit Malaya's principal sources of revenue. But Malaya's political problems are more immediately a concern of Britain, which still has suzerainty in varying degrees over Singapore, and the territories of North Borneo, Sarawak and Brunei.

Because the Communist threat is most acute in South Vietnam and Laos, these are the crisis points in the area from the U.S.' point of view. Because of its proximity, Thailand cannot be separated from the problem in this sector.

"It's too bad," an American diplomat in another Southeast Asian state said recently, "that Washington can't seem to act strongly in a country until there's a crisis."

The Kennedy administration's policy of seeking a coalition regime in Laos is controversial to say the least among our friends in Vientiane and Bangkok. And it has raised eyebrows from Australia to Pakistan.

Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, the strongman in Prince Boun Oum's government, is convinced of the danger that the pro-Communists will eventually prevail in a coalition. To prevent this, he had insisted that the pro-Western side keep control of the army and police. The United States and Soviet Union, acting in rare agreement, want these key portfolios handed over to neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma.

Those who agree with General Phoumi include Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the anti-Communist Premier of Thailand. Sarit is giving Vientiane economic aid in an effort to offset the punitive suspension of the U.S. dole of \$3 million monthly to the Boun Oum regime.

But the unchecked Communist advance in northwest Laos this week has strengthened the U.S. feeling that the Royal Lao Army is ineffective and that a coalition government is the only answer.

The U.S. position in Laos obviously rests upon confidence in the good faith of neutralist Souvanna Phouma and the Communists. This is plainly a gamble. If our bet turns out to be wrong, it will be rather late to prevent the other side from pulling in the pot.

U.S. ADVICE

American military men in South Vietnam are advised on arrival that they are "there to advise, not to command." In this framework our efforts to aid the Vietnamese are severely limited by the shortcomings of the Saigon regime.

American officers are not free to overrule the deployment of Ngo Dinh Diem's 200,000-man army plus auxiliary paramilitary forces in accordance with the political purposes of the President and his powerful brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu.

As a result the greatly outnumbered Vietcong continues to score in surprise forays against undermanned outposts. And the extraordinarily inept administration of theoretically sound programs to break the Vietcong's hold on the loyalties of the peasant

population continues to play into the hands of the enemy.

An example is the heavy-handed implementation of "Operation Sunrise," the project for relocating villagers in protected strategic hamlets. Eyewitnesses have noted that youths of military age have been conspicuously lacking among transplanted groups. The presumption has been that many if not all of these have defected to the Vietcong.

These accounts tend to belie official statements implying that the Vietcong recruits mainly by abductions and other terror tactics. In any case, the main problem in Vietnam is still to get the peasants to help the Government rather than the enemy.

Operation Sunrise, combined with direct military action mixing use of modern weapons with less familiar antiguerrilla tactics, may still work in South Vietnam as eventually happened in Malaya. The complicating factor in Operation Sunrise, however, is the attachment of the Vietnamese to their ancestral soil, an attachment the Malaysians generally lack.

CIVIL STRIFE

One of the imponderables in Vietnam is the widely discussed possibility that the Ngo Dinh Diem government may be overturned by a more skillful application of coup d'état tactics than the abortive attempt by disaffected army officers in November 1960. Americans hesitate to contemplate the prospects for widespread civil disruption to the benefit of the Communists should the regime be upset.

Thailand has recently sought to bolster her defensive position by obtaining a guarantee of military protection from the United States. Should Laos fall and the Communists move southward, Bangkok may call for help under this agreement.

With Laos still unsettled and a long war ahead in South Vietnam and other areas still uncertain, it is too early to try to predict whether events will turn out to the benefit of the West in southeast Asia on any front. But the prospects are for deep involvement of the United States in this area for a long time.

